



## Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

### Witness Biographies

### Judicial Independence in Central America

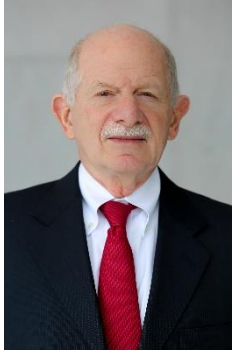
#### Panel I



**Eric L. Olson** is a member of the Interim Leadership Team and Director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives for the Seattle International Foundation. He oversees the Foundation's engagement with the DC-based policy community and provides strategic policy advice to the Foundation's Central American partners on priority issues including promoting rule of law and good governance, ending forced migration and displacement, ensuring equity, and strengthening civil society. In addition to his work with SIF, Mr. Olson is a Wilson Center Global Fellow. He previously served at the Wilson Center as the Mexico Institute and Latin American Program's Deputy Director for 11 years. Prior to the Wilson Center, he worked with the Secretariat for Political Affairs at the Organization of American States as a Senior Specialist on Good Governance; at Amnesty International USA as Advocacy Director for the Americas; and at the Washington Office on Latin America as Senior Associate for Mexico.



**Claudia Paz y Paz** is the Director for Central America and Mexico at the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL). She is a criminal law specialist, scholar, judge, and litigator who has worked for over 18 years to strengthen the justice system in Guatemala. Prior to joining CEJIL, Ms. Paz y Paz was the first woman to serve as Guatemala's Attorney General. During her term in office she achieved the conviction of high-ranking members of the military and of former president Efraín Ríos Montt for crimes against humanity. Ms. Paz y Paz was appointed to the first Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI) tasked with investigating the disappearance of the 43 students from Ayotzinapa, Mexico, and to the second GIEI which investigated the violence in Nicaragua in the wake of the protests in April and May 2018.



**Mark L. Schneider** is a Senior Advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in the Americas program and Human Rights Initiative. Mr. Schneider served as Director of the Peace Corps from 1999-2001, and as Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean of the U.S. Agency for International Development from 1993-1999, during which time he oversaw the post-conflict reconstruction programs in Central America, led the U.S. delegation to international donor conferences and coordinated the response to Hurricane Mitch. Previously, he served as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in State Department's Office of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs from 1977-1979, focusing on responding to the human rights violations of dictatorial regimes and pursuing international diplomatic support for human rights treaties. Mr. Schneider engaged with civil society while in government, and later joined the International Crisis Group, serving as Senior Vice President from 2001 until March 2017, working on conflict prevention and responsibility to protect issues globally.



**Dr. José Luis González Dubón** is a Constitutional Attorney and Former Professor of Constitutional Law at Francisco Marroquín University and is the President of Corporación de Abogados Especialistas. He has forty-eight years of experience in litigation. He was a professor of law at San Carlos University, Francisco Marroquín University, in Guatemala. Among his activities he has carried out economic, political and legislative constitutional studies. An investigative journalist, Dr. González is also a columnist, speaker, political and economic analyst, and is a Guatemalan politics opinion journalist on television show "Conversemos," *Vea Canal*.



**Irina Bitkova** fled Russia in 2009, for Guatemala with her husband Igor, and daughter Anastasia. Fearing for their lives, they were pursued by the Kremlin through Andrey Akimov, Chairman of Gazprombank and Andrey Kostin, president of VTB Bank (both were sanctioned by Treasury in 2018 while their banks were first sanctioned in 2014). A Guatemalan law firm applied for documents on the Bitkovs' behalf. The documents were official but illegally issued by Guatemala. Though the Palermo Convention states that migrants are not criminally liable for documents offenses, CICIG pursued the Bitkovs, and secured a 19 year sentence for Igor and 14 years for Irina and Anastasia. They are currently under house arrest in Guatemala and maybe returned to prison at any time.



**Brittany Benowitz** is Chief Counsel of the American Bar Association's Center for Human Rights. Since 2011, she has served as director of the ABA's Justice Defenders program. Previously, she served for four years as a defense advisor to a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In that capacity, she conducted oversight of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and monitored U.S. counterterrorism, foreign assistance, arms control and security sector reform policies. She has worked on litigation in civil and criminal courts both in the United States and abroad and conducted human rights investigations in Latin America, Eastern Europe and South Asia. She received her Juris Doctorate from the Washington College of Law at American University.